

MEMORANDUM

TO: Steve Weinberger,
Whitlock & Weinberger Transportation, Inc. (W-Trans)
490 Mendocino Avenue, Suite 201
Santa Rosa, CA 95401

CC: Brian Lasagna; Senior Planner, Butte County Association of Governments
Chuck Rough, Town Manager
Al McGreehan, Community Development Director

FROM: Radley Ott; Associate Engineer
Dennis Schmidt, Public Works Director/Town Engineer

RE: Comments to the DRAFT Skyway Corridor Study (version Nov. 3, 2008)

DATE: November 5, 2008

GENERAL COMMENTS:

1. We agree with the comments that BCAG provided on this draft version.
2. In the downtown area, we believe this preferred alternative is addressing and correcting the stated goals of pedestrian safety, and reduction in traffic speed. However, the obvious cost is a reduction in traffic capacity, which begs the question of whether there will be enough capacity? We solicit assistance from professional traffic engineers to mathematically model and estimate traffic conditions. We should listen to this professional advice, but also understand that traffic modeling is a tremendously difficult phenomenon to quantify and that a good portion of common sense should be applied to the decision making process. For example, in paragraph 3, page 22, the author indicates the regional BCAG traffic model lacks details that can influence driver decisions. Additionally, it is my understanding that many of the commercial accesses within the downtown area are not evaluated in the model as well. From the stakeholder interviews, difficulty with parking in the downtown area was indicated. We feel that the LOS of these commercial accesses and local roadways with the downtown Skyway section will be substantially compromised with the proposed lane reductions.
3. There is a substantial diurnal traffic loading on the Skyway, with traffic being greater in the southbound lanes in the AM, and visa versa in the PM. The technical appendix indicates this phenomenon. However, we want to make sure that this effect is being adequately noted and represented in the report. For instance, does the graph on page 21 that illustrates the differences between allowable traffic volume/capacity within the project reach adequately reflect this diurnal effect?
4. We feel that a full scale physical model or test of the proposed preferred alternative would be very beneficial in answering the question of whether there will be enough capacity. Furthermore, we believe that this physical test should take place before the RDA council gives final approval on the proposed traffic design. We understand that this model will not fully implement the assumed conditions mentioned in the Operational Analysis portion of the report, but the physical model will provide a good idea of what the final condition would be like.
5. Serious consideration should be placed on the proposed lane widths. An 11 ft lane width sounds like it should be adequate, but a typical lane width is at least 12 ft-especially on an arterial roadway. Currently the lane widths are relatively large with 13-14 feet wide. The proposed lane constriction will provide an element of 'traffic calming', or reduction in traffic speed. Additionally, this corridor is our primary truck route that typically experiences oversized loads (logging equipment, mobile homes, fire equipment and large construction

delivery trucks). Our concern is with the practical functionality and safety with these narrow lanes in such a heavily used corridor. There may need to be some adjustments on how the widths of lanes and sidewalks will be.

6. Section C1: Oliver Road to Bille Road. The public comments revealed that the decision to maintain a 4 travel lane configuration vs. a two travel lane was split. Why was the 2-lane configuration chosen for this draft? We need to consider what the costs and benefits are of reducing this section to only 2 lanes. Do we really require 8-12 feet of on-street parking along the Veteran's Park area? We agree that a double left turn from Skyway to Elliot could be appropriate to maintain an acceptable LOC in this intersection.
7. We recognize the caveats associated with, and assumed to be in place to help this preferred alternative function. On page 22, several items are discussed which indicate that the traffic signals within the downtown (Oliver to Black Olive) "must be coordinated in order to achieve smooth traffic flow through downtown." Additionally, there will need to be some roadway modification on Elliott to make this configuration function. Additionally, intersection improvements should be provided at the Almond intersections with Elliott and Pearson. We understand that not only will traffic signals be required with this plan, but also some fairly substantial roadway improvements as well. We are concerned with the overall high costs and questionable benefits related with this configuration in the downtown area.
8. This proposed preferred alternative will be utilizing Almond as a 'bypass' corridor. Is this really what we want to do? Essentially, we are moving traffic that should be on an arterial, and moving/redirecting to a small commercial roadway. We understand the needs associated with the skyway downtown corridor, but I fear that after this lane reductions are in place on the Skyway, we will be trying to figure out how to rectify the Almond corridor.
9. We appreciate the discussion on the Emergency Evacuation and would suggest that raised medians not be considered. As the discussion indicates, this would not work for emergency evacuation. Additionally, raised medians are costly to install, landscape and maintain, and would also limit any future flexibility with the roadway lane configuration. For instance, if after this configuration is implemented, we decide that it just does not function very well, we would have to tear out the raised medians and rebuild the roadway.
10. Upon looking at the graph on page 21 that illustrates the differences between allowable traffic volume/capacity within the project, it should be noted that the values graphed represent the total traffic (both north and south bound) in the downtown area. This appears to be misleading as both AM and PM traffic are significantly loaded onto one lane, and the specific 'demand lane' should be compared, and decisions based on those values.
11. Town Staff has discussed some possible interim measures that could be accomplished at a minimal cost and we hope to have a beneficial result. For instance, one interim measure being considered would be the installation of traffic signals or pedestrian crossing signals at the Fir-Skyway intersection that could help mitigate the pedestrian crossing problem at that location relatively quickly, and without altering existing lane configurations. Another interim measure being considered that would be an even faster and cheaper solution at the Fir-Skyway intersection would be the installation of an all-way stop sign at that intersection. We feel that this would achieve the goals of slowing down traffic and provide for safer pedestrian crossing. Again, these measures are being considered in an effort to think 'outside of the box' and achieve the stated goals in a more timely and cost effective manner. Consequently, we are discussing and considering the overall costs and benefits of these interim measures.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS:

12. When listing the bulleted descriptions for the each segment of the preferred alternative, we should indicate that Seg. A and C will no longer have roadside parking.